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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CHISINAU 000375

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [MD](#)
SUBJECT: VORONIN TO INTRODUCE CONSTITUTIONAL
CHANGES, ASKS USG FOR INDEPENDENT MEDIA COMMISSION

Classified by: Ambassador Asif J. Chaudhry for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: In a May 18 meeting with President Voronin to discuss the current political situation, the Ambassador also raised the importance of taking action to turn around the damage done to Moldova's world image by human rights violations following the April 7 events. Voronin and the Ambassador agreed on creating an independent media commission (with U.S. and possibly EU experts) to make recommendations on how to achieve true media freedom.

12. (C) Voronin believed that Mrs. Greceanii would be elected President and thought it possible that Urechean and his AMN party might defect from the opposition to vote with PCRM. Voronin will ensure a strict 60-40 proportional distribution of seats and committee chairs according to opposition representation in the parliament. Voronin plans to introduce constitutional amendments to strengthen Moldova as a Parliamentary system. These changes would involve strengthening the Prime Minister, while weakening the President.
End Summary

Electing a President: Urechean to Defect?

13. (C) In a May 18 meeting President Voronin discussed with Ambassador Chaudhry (accompanied by Pol/Econ Chief) the prospects for PCRM's candidate, the outgoing Prime Minister Mrs. Zinaida Greceanii, to be elected as president. He hinted at the possibility of coming to a deal with Urechean's party. He explained that the opposition was divided into two parts -- Chirtoaca's Liberal Party and Filat's Liberal Democratic Party (which were both "absolutely controlled by Romania") and Urechean's Moldova Noastra party (AMN) (which was "autonomous" and could take independent decisions). Having aligned himself with the declarations of the other two parties, Urechean was now in a bind. Voronin claimed to have information from sources within the AMN suggesting that they wanted to break out of this alignment, but did not know how.

14. (C) Voronin believed that the majority of AMN's 11 MPs opposed repeat Parliamentary elections. However, the AMN reps feared that if they were to go over to PCRM side, they would repeat the Rosca scenario (which ended up with Rosca losing his electorate's support to charges of "treason" and not making it into the next parliament). Voronin laid nine-to-one odds that if there were repeat Parliamentary elections, Urechean's party would

not pass the six percent threshold. Voronin said he underlined that he would not take any illegal measures to attract someone from another party. In case Urechean's party did decide to change positions, it would be better, opined Voronin, for all members to take part in this decision. The AMN could then play an intermediary role between the Party of Communists and the opposition parties.

Cooperating with Opposition in Parliament

¶5. (C) Voronin claimed that he was ready to work constructively with the opposition. He noted that he was organizing all bodies in the parliament according to the principle of representation, i.e. in a 60-40 proportion. This ratio would hold for membership in committees (including the important ones), committee chairmanship seats, and the Permanent Bureau. Voronin said that as Speaker he would guarantee that there would be no discrimination in Parliament on the grounds of party membership

Constitutional Changes; Parliamentary System

¶6. (C) Voronin said that as Speaker he would work to create a "true Parliamentary Republic" in Moldova. He said that this would necessitate changes to the Constitution. Voronin planned to

CHISINAU 00000375 002 OF 003

strengthen the institutions of the Parliament and the Government (i.e. Prime Minister) while weakening the powers of the President.

¶7. (C) Voronin explained the methodology for carrying out these changes, noting that in case the amendments did not have the necessary support in parliament, they would be voted on in a national referendum. (Note: Articles 141-143 of the Constitution explain the procedures for amending the constitution. To pass in Parliament, a constitutional amendment must receive a two-thirds majority, i.e. 68 votes or, it may be passed by a simple majority in a popular referendum in which more than three-fifths of those on the voter lists participate. End Note)

Need to Fix Negative Image of Moldova

¶8. (C) The Ambassador stressed that many of the GOM actions since April 7 have created a very negative impression of Moldova in the United States and in Europe. The Ambassador noted that after April 7 stories had traveled around the world about the arrests and how detainees were abused in prison. There were reports of how the press was put under pressure and that in the last few weeks, there were reports of NGO harassment, forcing them to provide information on their membership and financing. All of these actions had creating a negative impression and damaged the image of Moldova. If Moldova wanted to develop in a pro-Western direction, this bad image needed to be fixed by ensuring greater respect for human rights and greater media freedoms.

¶9. (C) The Ambassador's remarks struck just the right chord, because Voronin replied with conviction that this was "very correct" and "absolutely true." The Ambassador expressed his readiness to work with Voronin and the new

government to help create an atmosphere where we could truly say that the media was operating freely and that NGOs and civil society were working freely. This would create a positive image for Moldova (and for Voronin as a leader), argued the Ambassador.

Creation of an Independent Media Commission

¶10. (C) A discussion of media issues ensued in which Voronin discussed the very open criticisms of the GOM in opposition newspapers and argued that he had never received any document proving the fact that any newspapers had their freedom of expression limited. In response to the Ambassador's list of incidents of press harassment, Voronin suggested an independent committee of foreign experts to analyze the current situation with respect to press freedom. The Ambassador agreed that this would be worthwhile to show the world that President Voronin and the GOM were not afraid of a free press.

¶11. (C) The Ambassador proposed that he would try to find the funding to bring experts here for to analyze the situation and make recommendations to the GOM on how to achieve a truly free press. Voronin was very pleased with this plan, said "Super!! Ideal" and made the sign of the cross, an Orthodox religious gesture meant to demonstrate his sincerity about this plan. The Ambassador agreed to look for ways to bring experts for this study, suggesting the possibility for forming this media commission with participation of EU experts.

Voronin on NGOs

¶12. (C) Voronin was less forthcoming on NGO freedoms than he had been on media. He noted that Moldova had 26,000 NGOs registered, which he thought was "absolutely too many." He claimed that thousands of millions of Euros were being laundered through European structures in support of these NGOs. The Ambassador explained how

CHISINAU 00000375 003 OF 003

pressure on the NGOs involved in the elections events had contributed to the negative impression of Moldova that needed to be fixed. Voronin said that some NGOs had been used to launder money through Moldova and he had been working without success to ensure that money that entered the country went through the national treasury to avoid such possibilities. The Ambassador assured the President that any money that entered the country for MCC would remain under his personal control.

Moldova's Future

¶13. (C) President Voronin said that his vision for Moldova's future would be outlined at the Parliament in Mrs. Greceanii's speech before the elections on May 20. She would outline five dimensions for the future of Moldova. Most important for the GOM would be the overarching principle of continuity of development of democratic reforms moving forward towards the goals of European integration. He expressed satisfaction with his recent contacts with high-level European leaders, noting that he now had

telephone contacts with Solana each week.

¶14. (C) Comment: We had already speculated that as Speaker, Voronin would seek to reshuffle the deck in regard to the distribution of power between the President, the Prime Minister and the Speaker. While he talked about strengthening the post of the Prime Minister, it is likely that these changes will push the pendulum towards the Speaker as the center of power in the Moldovan government. His comment confirmed that he has projected plans to accomplish this by introducing constitutional changes. Though Voronin assumes that the PCRM will eventually succeed in getting Mrs. Greceanii elected as President, he acknowledged that this might not happen on the first round on May 20. The PCRM still has a long way to go in coming to an agreement with the opposition on working together in the new parliament. It is ironic that Voronin is now pushing a reform such as the 60-40 proportional balance in parliament that he never would have countenanced as President. Even more ironic is his willingness to change the country's constitution to suit his own needs, keeping the presidency strong when it is his post, and shifting the power to the parliament and the government, once he was elected as Speaker.

CHAUDHRY